

Don Darnhauer
A Celebration of Life
Sept. 18, 1931 – June 8, 2026

My name is Bob Kelton, and I am honored to be here today to celebrate the life of my friend, Downtown Don Darnhauer.

Today, we say goodbye to someone who was truly special—a man whose impact on Downtown Long Beach can be seen not only in the buildings, organizations, and neighborhoods around us, but in the people he inspired and the community he helped create.

Most people knew Don for his extraordinary dedication to improving his community. He was known for his patience, persistence, and willingness to speak up on behalf of others. Through decades of volunteer service and community leadership, Don helped shape Downtown Long Beach into the vibrant place it is today.

He served on numerous city commissions, advisory boards, and community organizations. His contributions were recognized with many awards, including the Spirit of Downtown Award and in 2023, the Downtown Long Beach Alliance established the annual **Downtown Don Anchor Award**, honoring the very qualities that defined him: persistence, patience, community involvement, and unwavering support of local businesses.

Don was instrumental in the creation of both the North Pine Neighborhood Alliance and the Ocean Residents Community Association. He later became a founding member of the Downtown Residential Council, a nonprofit that brings together representatives from all the downtown neighborhoods to work collaboratively on issues affecting our community.

Little by little, Downtown Long Beach evolved. New businesses arrived. New residents moved in. New neighborhood organizations formed. The vibrant downtown we enjoy today was built in part because people like Don who refused to stop believing in its potential.

I first met Don through downtown community activities. We both served on the DLBA Board. Don was also the NPNA rep to the Downtown Residential Council, and I represented ORCA on the DRC Board.

Don encouraged me to run for Treasurer of the DRC. Later, with his encouragement I became President—a role I still hold eight years later. Like many others, I benefited from his mentorship, encouragement, and confidence.

We also shared a number of personal connections. We were both Eagle Scouts and believed deeply in service to others. Don served as a Coast Guard Warrant Officer, and my father spent his career in the Army, so we often found ourselves talking about military life, leadership, and duty.

One of the things I appreciated most about Don was that he understood that building community also meant building friendships.

We volunteered together at Scout fundraising events and we attended countless community meetings. And we shared some memorable moments along the way.

One of my favorites was during the opening celebration of The Loop at Pine and Ocean. Kathy and I played Don and Barbi in what became an epic game of cornhole. None of us were entirely sure of the official rules, so we simply made up our own as we went along. As it turned out, our version wasn't all that different from the real game—and we certainly had fun playing it.

During the COVID pandemic, many neighborhood organizations struggled. Meetings were banned and all of the groups became inactive. After restrictions were lifted, Don and Barbi played a key role in helping restart the North Pine Neighborhood Alliance and encouraging a new generation of neighborhood leaders to step forward.

That was one of Don's greatest strengths. He didn't just lead—he helped others become leaders.

Don was also instrumental in helping Downtown Long Beach transition from the uncertainty that followed the decline of the Pike and Navy-era economy into the thriving residential, dining, entertainment, and business district we know today.

What made Don so effective was not simply that he cared—it was how he approached problems.

He was thoughtful. He was reasonable and he listened.

He understood that real progress is rarely achieved through volume or confrontation. It is achieved through patience, relationships, and perseverance.

Don's greatest legacy is not any single project, organization, or award. It is the generation of community leaders he inspired. Many of us here today are involved because Don encouraged us, mentored us, or showed us what effective community service looks like.

As we remember Don today, let us also remember the values he embodied: service, kindness, persistence, respect, and community.

Those of us who remain have the opportunity—and the responsibility—to carry those values forward.

Don's legacy lives on in the community he helped shape, the countless lives he touched, and the example of civic engagement he leaves behind.

He will be deeply missed, fondly remembered, and forever appreciated.

Don was a devoted husband, father, a loyal friend, a trusted neighbor, and an extraordinary community leader.

Thank you, Don, for showing us what one person can accomplish through a lifetime of service.

May we honor your memory by continuing the work you loved so much.